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JOSEPH A. MIKUŠ

THE THREE SLOVAK BISHOPS

THEIR STRUGGLE FOR GOD AND SLOVAKIA



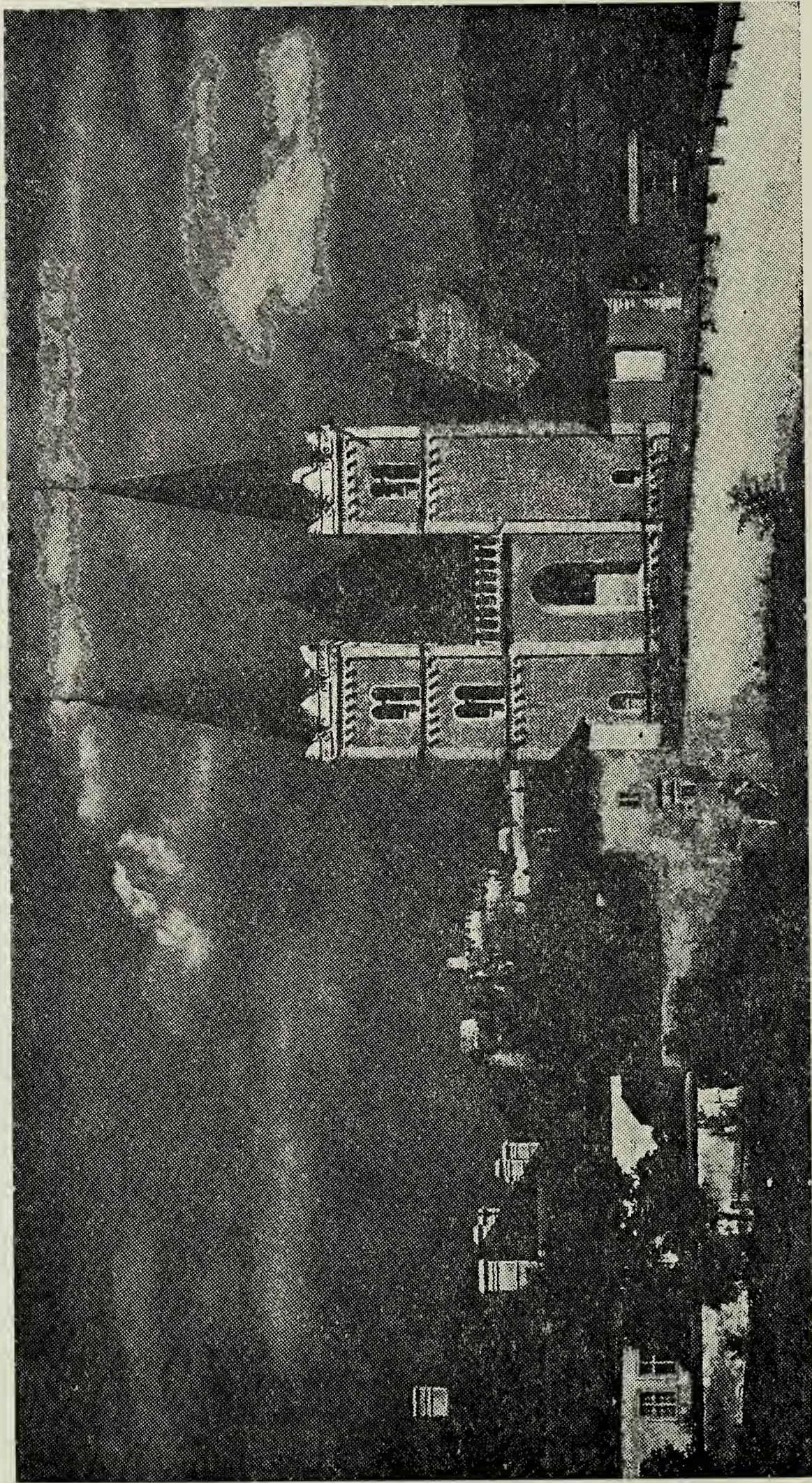
Slovak Catholic Federation of America

1953



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The Three Slovak Bishops



This is a view of the residence of the Bishop of Spiš and the historic church of the Spiš Diocese.

In the background may be seen a 13th century castle.

JOSEPH A. MIKUŠ

THE THREE SLOVAK BISHOPS

THEIR STRUGGLE FOR GOD AND SLOVAKIA
UNTIL THEIR CONDEMNATION BY THE
COMMUNISTS IN 1951



Slovak Catholic Federation of America
1953



This booklet, "The Three Slovak Bishops", was published by the Slovak Catholic Federation of America on the 2nd anniversary of the trial of the three Slovak prelates. Its author is Dr. Joseph A. Mikus. The symbolic design on the cover was drawn by Dr. Joseph Cincik. Printed in the Slovak Catholic Sokol Printery, 205 Madison Street, Passaic, New Jersey.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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While Slovak Bishops, Msgr. Dr. M. Buzalka, Msgr. J. Vojtassak, and Msgr. P. Gojdic were standing trial before the Communist judges between January 10 and 15, 1951, in Bratislava, it appeared that the accusations placed against them by the Communist Government in Czecho-Slovakia were believed by a part of the free press of the world. We have every reason to believe that this credulity was caused by the circles that do not wish to see Slovakia, and especially the Slovak Catholics, in their true light. Consequently, the present historical account "The Three Slovak Bishops" is presented for the purpose of showing the Communist distortion of the truth, by explaining the entire national, political, social and religious background, which played such a big role in the Communist accusations against above-mentioned Bishops. The author of this account is the former Slovak diplomat, Dr. Joseph A. Mikus, living now as political refugee in Washington, D. C. The English translation was made by Rev. Daniel Drab, OFM.

SLOVAK CATHOLIC FEDERATION
OF AMERICA.

FOREWORD

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In January, 1951, three Catholic Bishops of Slovakia were made to stand "trial" before one of the notorious Courts behind the Iron Curtain. They were: the Most Reverend Michael Buzalka, Auxiliary Bishop of Trnava, the Most Reverend Paul Gojdic, Greek-Catholic Bishop of Presov, and the Most Reverend John Vojtassak, Bishop of Spis. All three were convicted summarily, and each received a sentence well calculated to end his days in prison. They, too, joined the long list of victims of the most ruthless persecution since the days of Nero.

The Catholics of Slovakia must have been struck with horror at the news of the Bishops' imprisonment. At the same time, however, they came to realize the truth of the continuity of Our Lord's suffering in His Mystical Body. Yesterday it was in pagan Rome, today it is behind the Iron Curtain, and tomorrow, quite unbelievably, it might take place here in the United States. Christ did not promise immunity from persecution to His followers; on the contrary, He warns us to be prepared to suffer for His sake at all times.

In the fall of 1947 I was very fortunate in spending a few days with one of these Bishops, His Excellency, the Most Reverend John Vojtassak, in Slovakia. It was no surprise, a few years later, to read that the Catholics of that country, lacking weapons, defended their priests and nuns with pitchforks. Quite evidently they caught a spark of the Christian fortitude with which this intrepid champion of the

Faith had impressed me during my visit with him. The other two Bishops, no doubt, are equally brave. I am convinced that future generations will hail these three as martyrs and saints of the Church. They need no defense; the author of this booklet very ably describes the perfidy of their "trial". We owe it to ourselves and to our posterity to record their heroism and loyalty to Christ.

At this moment the people in this part of the world still free are well acquainted with the tactics used by the modern persecutors of the Church. In a sense, although torture is equally painful in all ages, the Roman persecutors, even if not less ruthless, were at least not as perfidious. This booklet indicates this point clearly. But it also gives sufficient evidence that the hierarchy of Catholic Slovakia is truly emulating the Good Shepherd Himself.

November 1952

† THEODORE G. KOJIS, O.S.B.
Abbot of St. Andrew's Abbey
Cleveland, O.

INTRODUCTION

With the coming of Communism into Central Europe, Catholic Slovakia, in 1945, found itself in the front line of the ideological war. Having completely mastered Czecho-Slovakia politically, at the beginning of 1948, Gottwald's Communist regime endeavored simply to destroy Catholicism, the main moral power of anti-Communist opposition in Slovakia. With the confiscation of Church properties, the State ended the material independence of the Church. With a law concerning the salaries of the clergy, the regime placed the priests entirely in the official class. The priest became simply a functionary of the State. The end and final aim of this political legislation is to turn Slovak Catholics away from the Holy See and introduce the schismatic "national" or "State" Church, which in the final phase of the ideological war could be made subject to the Orthodox Patriarch in Moscow, the spiritual helper of World Communism. The elimination of the Slovak Bishops, faithful to the Holy Father, would be but one step in the process.

After the theatrical exhibition of the trial of Cardinal Mindszenty in Hungary, it was expected that the Gottwald regime in Czecho-Slovakia would attack the Slovak Bishops to deprive them of power to exercise their spiritual functions. And so in the autumn of 1950, there were imprisoned three of the most distinguished Church personalities in Slovakia: Msgr. John Vojtassak, Bishop of Spis; Msgr. Dr. Michael Buzalka, Auxiliary Bishop of Trnava; and Msgr. Paul Gojdic, Greek Catholic Bishop of Presov.

Their trial was conducted before the State Court in Bratislava, between January 10 and 15, 1951. As is already well known, the Communist Court sentenced Msgr. Buzalka and Msgr. Gojdic to life imprisonment, and Msgr. Vojtassak, a 73 year old man, to 24 years of imprisonment.

The accusing documents presented against the three Bishops, who today, are considered religious and national martyrs, will be of historical significance. The entire present European epoch, with its subverted ideology and politics, is clearly pictured in them. The activities of the Catholic Bishops, examined under the microscope of the Marx-Lenin philosophy, are interpreted as being essentially wicked.

According to Marxist jargon, under the Hungarian regime "the hierarchy of the Church, living in palaces and possessing large land properties, abused the religious sentiments of the Slovak people in order to hold on to their supremacy and the supremacy of the Hungarian lords and capitalists. With iron discipline and threats of eternal damnation it kept the small Slovak nation in servitude." During the first Czecho-Slovak Republic, the Slovak Bishops were said to be "members of a traitorous People's Party". During the Slovak State "they became cells for Fascism in Slovakia". The Bishops approved "the declaration and the carrying on of the war against Poland and the Soviet Union". Msgr. Vojtassak "approved" in the State Council all race laws. Msgr. Gojdic "abused the entire Greek-Catholic Church in Slovakia in direct support of the Nazis in their plunderous attack on the Soviet Union". Therefore, the Bishops are responsible for "all the hardships and sacrifices brought on the lives of the Slovak people, and for the immense economic losses, which the Slovak nation suffered in consequence of the wicked support of "Hitler's war". Upon them also falls the responsibility for the lack of success of the "Slovak national" uprising.

Furthermore, the Bishops were said to harbor "an unfriendly attitude toward a renovated Czecho-Slovak State". In 1946, the hierarchy of the Church oriented itself toward the "reactionary" Democratic Party and attempted to set aside the just punishment of the "traitor" Msgr. Joseph Tiso. It held illegal contacts with Slovak emigrants. The Bishops "were organizing miracles in Tvrdomestice for the purpose of seducing the people,

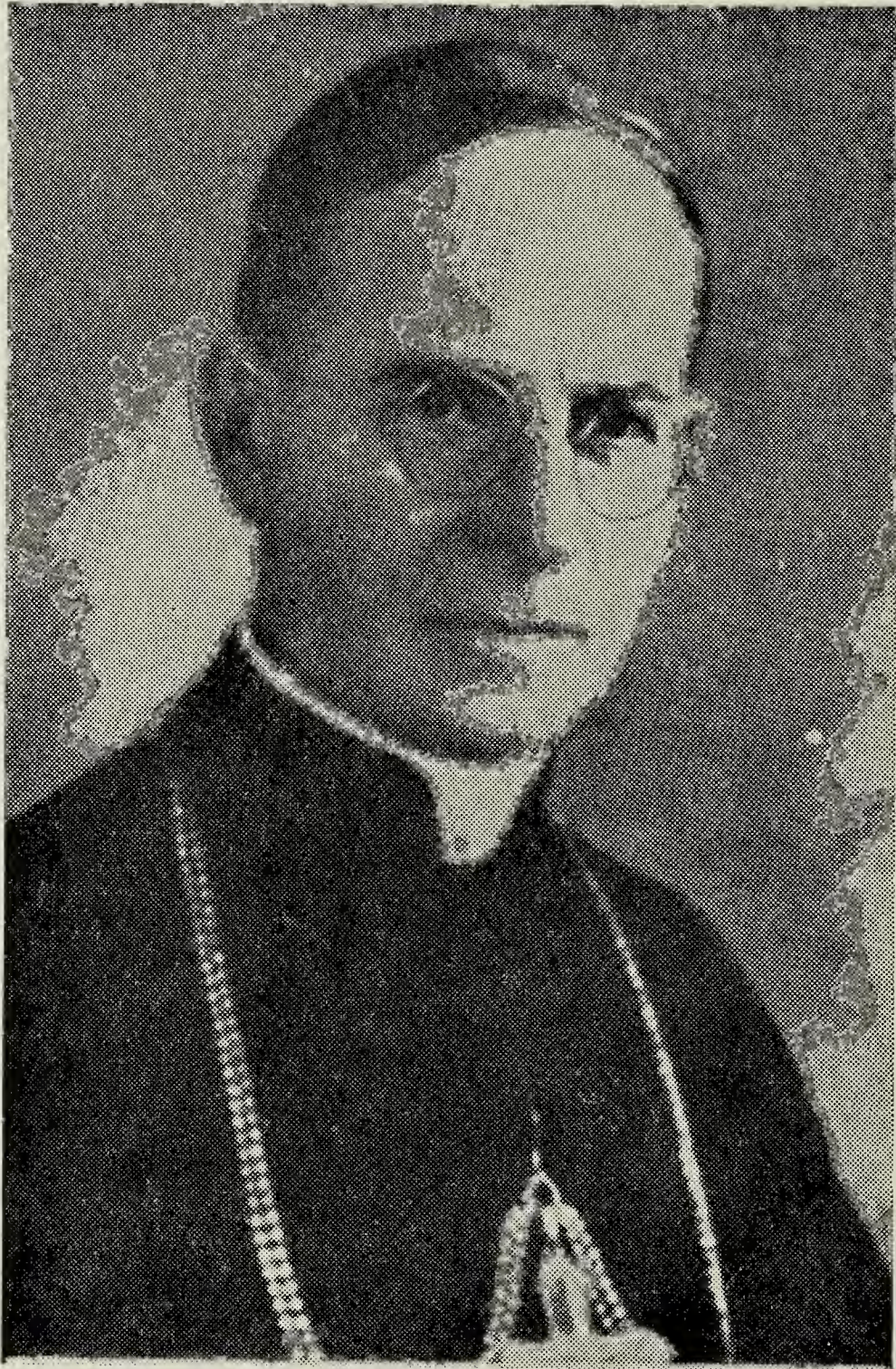
to convince them that God does not agree with the make-up of Socialism in the Republic." Politically and economically they were "sabotaging the State structure." They rejected "Catholic Action" 1/ which had come to an understanding with the State. Msgr. Gojdic was accused of betraying military secrets, and all three Bishops were said to carry on espionage. Finally, they were said to have organized a "secret hierarchy", and are making an "underground organization of the Church".

This, briefly, was their complete fault!

The entire speech of the public prosecutor, interwoven as it was with lies and half-truths, is a masterpiece. It is a Marxist interpretation of religious and Church functions. Fundamentally, then, the entire Catholic Church is on trial.

The commentary which we offer to this confused complaint will be developed in chronological order, because the public prosecutor misinterpreted the thoughts and works of the three Bishops from their youth, and during the different political regimes and situations in which they exercised their spiritual functions.

1/ A schismatic "Catholic Action" has been organized on June 10, 1949, in Prague, under the protection of the Government, by a group of pro-Communist Catholics.



MOST REV. JÁN VOJTASSAK
Bishop of Spiš

I. THE FIRST AND SECOND CZECHO-SLOVAK REPUBLIC (1918-1938-1939)

A. The Bishops and the Slovak National Struggle

Before we begin speaking of the activities of Bishops Msgr. Vojtassak, Msgr. Buzalka and Msgr. Gojdic during the first Czecho-Slovak Republic, it is important to emphasize that from the time of the distinguished Štefan Moyzes, the Bishop of Banska Bystrica and the founder of the "Matica Slovenska", 2/ all the Bishops of Slovakia, up to the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were either Hungarian or German. Msgr. Vojtassak, Msgr. Blaha and Msgr. Kmetko, consecrated in Nitra in 1921, were the first Church dignitaries of Slovak origin. It was only natural therefore that they should defend Catholicism and Slovak national thought against any kind of foreign ideology.

The present Communist Government deemed it necessary to go back a quarter of a century to reproach them with the fact that in 1924 they had distributed a pastoral letter in which they threatened with Church penalties and "eternal damnation" any Catholic who would join a Marxist party, i. e. the Communist and the Social-Democratic Party. In like manner it accused Msgr. Vojtassak of writing a book at that time and having it published with the help of the Society of St. Adalbert (Spolok Sv. Vojtecha) 3/. The title of the book was: *Can a Catholic be a Social-Democrat?*

Nothing in the acts of the Bishops was more natural than this. Opposition between the Catholic Church and

2/ Slovak Institute of Sciences and Arts founded in 1863 at Turciarsky Sv. Martin.

3/ Slovak Catholic organization and publishing company, founded by Dr. Andrew Radlinsky, in 1870, at Trnava.

atheistic Marxist dogma has been admitted by the Church and the Marxists for a long time. The Slovak Bishops, therefore, could not do otherwise than condemn the two-faced policy of those Catholics who joined the above-mentioned parties. Even the Holy See had to threaten later such Catholics with excommunication on the strength of the decree of July, 1949. By that act, did the Catholic Bishops join the "reactionary" politics of the Hlinka's People's Party? This point is a matter of interpretation. The People's Party was the largest party in Slovakia. Its program was to work "for God and the nation". From the religious standpoint, the People's Party was defending the Catholic tradition of the country against a particularist Czech Husitism 4/. It was opposed to the establishment of the so-called "Czechoslovak" Church in Slovakia, which it considered a tool of Czech spiritual influence. It stayed loyally on the side of the Roman Church, and in opposition to the effort of the governmental circles of Prague decided to emancipate Czechoslovakia from the influence of Rome. (Masaryk, the first President, is the author of the expression: "Let us turn away from Rome!").

From the national point of view, the People's Party defended the democratic rights of the Slovak nation. It criticised the pseudo-democracy of the Prague Government. It was strongly opposed to the Czech policy aiming at the spiritual and linguistical Czechization of the Slovak nation. It resisted the economic and social discrimination which Prague established as a codified political system in relation to Slovakia. For all these reasons, the People's Party claimed a dualist Federal Union instead of the centralist system imposed upon Slovakia in 1920, in the form of a Constitution, by a Revolutionary Parliament that had been nominated by the Government. That solution would have brought to end the privileged situation of the Czechs in the Czecho-

4/ Jan Hus, the Czech religious reformer from the beginning of the Fourteenth Century.

Slovak Republic and carried out the principle of equality of both peoples in the common State.

If the Slovak people, in the spirit and interest of Christian integration, was disposed to abandon certain national rights in favor of a Czecho-Slovak Federal Government, it was not at all disposed to relinquish the Slovak national idea in favor of a Czech, i. e. foreign nationalism.

From the point of view of the Foreign policy, the People's Party was opposed to a military Alliance which Mr. Beneš signed in 1935 with the Soviet Union, in Moscow.

The People's Party, which the official propaganda of Prague labeled "a handful of exalted separatists", remained for nearly 20 years (except 1927-1928) in opposition to the particularist Czech policy in Prague. This opposition was aimed at first only against the centralized regime which intended to turn Slovakia into a Czech province. So many disappointments slowly extinguished any hope of improvement of the political situation, that in 1936 opposition to the central authority became even opposition to the idea of the "Czecho-slovak" State. A mass meeting of the People's Party in Piestany could not but declare in the summer of 1936 that Dr. Benes had not the least willingness to fulfill his promises to solve the Slovak question; this promise he had made to the Party to gain its support for the election to the presidency in 1935. The Catholic majority of the Slovak people (85 per cent), in its growing self-consciousness, could not allow Benes to govern Slovakia by the Protestant minority (Hodza, Slavik, Derer, etc.) and to remain deaf to the desires of the enormous mass of the non-Protestant population. Therefore, the Catholic people with their Bishops turned away from "Benes' Czecho-slovakia" long before Munich. Hlinka several times made the statement that the Slovak nation desired to live even at the price of the existence of the Czecho-Slovak Republic. Morally and internally therefore, the Czecho-

Slovak State fell apart long before it lost its international alliances in Munich.

Could the policies of the People's Party for this reason be called "separatist"? It is known that in 1924 the Communist International acknowledged the right of the Slovak nation to self-determination, i.e., the right to separate itself from the Czech. 5/.

The Communists, therefore, had proclaimed the Slovak separatist movement long before Hlinka, Tiso, or the Slovak Bishops.

B. Church Property

Since the Middle Ages the Church has possessed in Slovakia as in other European countries certain landed properties which assured her material existence. After the distribution of big properties resulting from the land reform of 1920, the agricultural lands of the dioceses, the parishes and monasteries added up to about 300,000 hectares. This Church ownership was recognized by the Czecho-Slovak Republic in the "Modus Vivendi" which was concluded with the Vatican in 1928. The Church was not particularly concerned about the ownership of the land. Her interest concerned itself only with her material independence which is a guarantee of spiritual freedom.

According to present Communist State the Slovak Bishops lived like feudal lords. You have to be a Communist to bring such an accusation against the Bishops. The Slovak Catholic hierarchy, as is well known, came from the people. Msgr. Vojtassak and many of other Bishops were sons of farmers. Their "palaces" were

5/ See: Cinquieme Congres de l' Internationale Communiste. Rapport de l' Exécutif, Paris 1924, page 422.: "The Communist Party of Czecho-Slovakia must especially support the fight of the Slovaks for independence, and endeavor to liberate this movement from the nationalistic bourgeois following, and join it to the common battle of the worker against capital."

buildings hundreds of years old, without any modern conveniences. Their mode of life was very simple. It is well known that Msgr. Vojtassak for many years ate only potatoes and buttermilk for supper. The Bishops had to support the seminaries, Catholic schools, orphanages, old-folks homes, etc. Could it have been possible for Msgr. Vojtassak to have an income that came to a couple million of crowns? 6/. That is possible! But when one considers the number of churches he built or renovated, the many Church schools he helped materially, the Seminary of the Spis diocese that he enlarged and modernized, the Institute for Catholic teachers in Spisska Kapitula, which he built from its foundations, as well as the Minor Seminary in Levoca, the establishment of a certain number of recreation youth centers, (in Hranovnica, Stiavnica, etc.), and the "Charitas" buildings in Bratislava and Dolny Smokovec, built in the most modern style, and which the Communists have now taken over for their own use, — when we consider all these works, it will be clear that the income of the Church was not wasted or the living of the Bishops extravagant. These works are a monument to both the organizational thought and the high-minded spirit of Bishop Vojtassak, whom no one in the Slovak hierarchy ever surpassed.

Sometime before the first World War, during the Hungarian rule, Msgr. Vojtassak, as a young assistant, contributed his watches to be sold for funds to build a Slovak national museum in Turciansky Sv. Martin. This Slovak patriot, austere with himself, was always generous toward others and toward the nation. If, therefore, the Communists, under hypocritical pretenses, endeavor to interfere with this distinguished Slovak personality, it cannot but react unfavorably upon those who are the real plunderers of the Slovak nation.

6/ 1 dollar — 50 crowns.



MOST REV. MICHAL BUZALKA, D.D.
Bishop of Trnava

II. THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC (1939 — 1945)

A. Was the Slovak State Totalitarian?

In March 1939, Hitler decided to desintegrate by military force the Czecho-Slovak Republic, which had already fallen apart spiritually. He apparently proposed one Protectorate in Czechia and another in Slovakia. That Slovakia avoided territorial dismemberment and German occupation and set itself up, on March 14, as an independent State, which even its adversaries had to admit 7/, was the result of the moral unity of the Slovak people and the political wisdom of the Bratislava Government. At this time of storm and stress in Central Europe, the national State became an object of deep interest for all Slovaks. The Slovak nation had achieved its right of self-determination. Even though the country was burdened with an international mortgage, which the German Reich, using as an excuse the Hungarian attack on Eastern Slovakia, forced on it (March 23, 1939) in the form of a "Schutzvertrag" (Treaty of protection), the Slovak State like a natural refuge in that situation was greeted by both the Catholic and Evangelical Bishops. The impressive personality of Msgr. Tiso, who was first the head of the Government and then President of the Republic, was a guarantee to all that the regime would not slip to the extreme right.

Did Msgr. Tiso succeed in holding this balance? Certainly! Depending on the wide concentration of all the Slovak democratic forces (the Party of National Unity) which was established and reinforced under the pressing events of the Munich and Vienna agreements, Tiso let into the Parliament, on the basis of comparative

7/ See, e. g. the "Czechoslovak History", Prague 1946, p. 803, by Kamil Krofta, former Czecho-Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs.

representation, the Hungarian and German minorities, and so assured internal order in the land. The Communists, nevertheless, cannot refer to the Slovak State without branding it as fascist. They cannot forget that Msgr. Tiso placed the Communist Party as a political power in Slovakia outside the law, because, receiving its orders from a foreign power, it represented a danger to the national community. Is the present-day political action of Australia and America against Communism totalitarian? Is an operation to remove an ulcer from the body politic a punishable act? It is evident that the Slovak Catholic Bishops, knowing the world-wide character of the Communist danger, could do nothing else but warn the Slovak people against it.

During the trial of the Slovak Bishops the State prosecutor endeavored to show that there existed a definite relationship between German National Socialism and the views defended by Msgr. Vojtassak. This can be true in a certain sense, for the Slovak State also endeavored to realize a social legislation within the framework of national community. This policy, however, was inspired by the Papal Encyclicals. This is evident from a statement which the State prosecutor found in one of the letters of Msgr. Vojtassak, and which he offered as evidence before the Court: "National Socialism, comprehended in the Christian sense and permeated with the teaching of Christ, can mean only a great protection for our people and for the priesthood that labors among them."

The Laborist system in Great Britain has often been defined as "national Socialism" without being compared to the Nazi regime. Social legislation is one of the greatest problems of the Twentieth Century for the Church, and as long as we have national States, it will be classed above all others as a national problem. Msgr. Vojtassak's attitude toward this problem really could not have been expressed more clearly than in the above statement.

B. War Against Poland and the Soviet Union

What can be said concerning the statement of the public prosecutor that the Slovak Republic declared war on "Catholic Poland" and the Soviet Union?

It is a well known fact that Poland, without respect for the thousand year old boundaries, in 1918, occupied the territory of Orava and Spis in northern Slovakia. Dr. Benes did not lose any sleep over the loss of these areas. Since he was determined to retain at least a part of the Tesin coal mines, it was easy for him to surrender this Slovak territory to Poland. Sacrificing 25,000 Slovaks for coal which had been used to keep Czech industry going, fitted in remarkably with his negotiating opportunism. For what the Czechs gained from Poland, the Slovaks had to pay. Slovakia, however, never acknowledged this business, and in 1939, after the occupation of Poland by the Germans, the Slovak Army again recovered these territories, or, it is better to say, that it protected them from the direct German Administration which had been set up there. On the Slovak side, there was no question of any war-like action, but of administrative action only. When, therefore, the Communist prosecutor during the Bishops' trial said that "the Church blessed the arms of the Slovak Army in its war against Poland", he uttered calumny, which over the years is nothing new in Communist behaviour.

Because the territories of Orava and Spis, before 1918 belonged to the Spis diocese, Msgr. Vojtassak became their administrator. It therefore lay within his jurisdiction to establish priests in those parishes which the Polish priests had abandoned on the advance of the German forces.

As far as Russia is concerned, it was the only country with which the Slovak Republic was at war. And even when the Russian war was declared by Prime Minister Tuka, the manner of declaration was not in accord with the Constitution, i.e., it was done without the previous approval of Parliament and the head of the State, and

was more fanciful than real. However, the Slovak fight against Bolshevism was real and remains a fact. The Slovak Republic participated in this war with one division as a fighting force, and another as an occupation force. At first Msgr. Vojtassak and then Msgr. Buzalka gradually organized divine services for these units. This fact was the convenient pretext for the State prosecutor to make his accusation concerning the anti-Soviet activity of the Army chaplains. It is possible that Msgr. Gojdic, the Greek-Catholic Bishop of Presov, sent some priests from his diocese into Ukraine, occupied at that time by the Germans. Because the occupation lasted three years, he, no doubt, had important pastoral reasons for his actions. It is true that Msgr. Gojdic helped priests and laymen who escaped from the Ukraine into Slovakia in order to get away from the Communists. Those were but acts of Christian charity, which, as a Bishop, he was bound to perform.

C. Msgr. Vojtassak—Member of the State Council

It is true that Msgr. Vojtassak was, during the Slovak Republic, a member of the State Council. Is it possible on the basis of this to accuse him of punishable acts? The jurisdiction of this constitutional organism must be first examined and known. According to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic of 1939, the State Council had no legislative or executive power. It rather held the role of a Supreme Court, for it had power of judging the President of the Republic and the members of the Government for treason. It was also within its jurisdiction to recall diplomatic envoys for formally stated causes. Outside of this, the State Council functioned as a consulting body of the President and the Government. But it could neither vote nor promulgate laws, and much less bring about their enforcement.

D. The Jewish Question

Furthermore, the solution of the Jewish question did not concern the State Council of Slovakia. Since Parliament had refused to vote an anti-Jewish law, the

Government itself had to issue decrees under German pressure, on September 9, 1941, which became known as the "Codex Judaicus", and which determined under what conditions the Jews might live in Slovakia. The synod of Slovak Bishops which met October 7, 1941, in Nitra, compiled a memorandum concerning these decrees, gathering together all the objections possible from the Catholic point of view. The synod then commissioned Msgr. Vojtassak, and Msgr. Skrabik, Bishop of Banska Bystrica, to lay this document before President Tiso and Prime Minister Tuka.

Alas, it is true that the Slovak Government, as so many other Central European countries, did deliver to the German officials about 30,000 Jews, on the basis of a special agreement concluded between Berlin and Bratislava. This agreement called for the transfer of the Jews to an autonomous Jewish territory, a kind of European Birobidjan, some place in Galicia, on the Russo-Polish border. The fact that the Nazis later began to put those Jews to death in the gas chambers of the Polish concentration camps, shook deeply the consciences of those in Government circles of Bratislava, since these had signed the agreement with Germany in good faith, i.e. without the least realization of the real intentions of the Nazis. Even Tuka, a known Germanophil, did not know the fate which the Germans had prepared for the unfortunate Jews. It never entered any one's mind that any one, even one with the greatest race prejudice, could act so cruelly toward a people.

However, as soon as the fact of Jewish persecution became known, the Slovak Government stopped any further shipping away of Jews to Poland. This fact was acknowledged by a delegate of the International Red Cross Committee in Geneva in the general report of this organization which stated that from Slovakia "the Jewish community attained, in 1944, complete stoppage of

forced emigration to territories under the domination of German officials". 8/.

As to the over-all condition of the Jews in Slovakia, the above report reads: "In Slovakia tens of thousands of Jews were forced to leave the territory and became members of the so-called slave-labor brigades, which, it would seem, led most of them to the death chambers. In spite of this, however, a great number of the Jewish community at the same time were able to remain at home, and there were times when Slovakia was considered a comparatively safe harbor for the Jews, especially those that came from Poland. It appears that the Jews who remained in Slovakia lived in comparative peace until the uprising against the German Army broke out at the end of 1944". 9/. The delegate of the International Red Cross Committee also acknowledges that the national Governments of Central Europe saved the Jews as long as it was within their power to do so. He writes of this: "In Hungary, as well as in Slovakia, it went comparatively well for the Jews as long as the local Government had the freedom of decision. But as the German embrace became stronger, from March of 1944, the situation of the Jews became more critical." 10/.

At any rate, the Bishop's synod could not but learn with sorrow and pity of all that the Jews had to suffer. March 22, 1943, the priests read a pastoral letter in all the Catholic churches of Slovakia, in which the Bishops criticized the none too strong stand of the Slovak Government on the Jewish question. Of this pastoral letter there is, however, no mention made in either the bill of indictment or at the judicial hearing of the Bishops. But it will suffice to remark that as long as documents exist which testify to the indignation of Msgr. Tiso and the

8/ Rapport du Comité International de la Croix Rouge sur son activité pendant la Deuxieme Guerre mondiale. Geneve 1948. I-III. Volume I, p. 674.

9/ Ibidem, Volume I, p. 674.

10/ Ibidem, Volume I, p. 675.

Slovak Bishops, awakened by German pressure in the Jewish question, there can be no proof which could be brought forth against their good and pure intention in this affair.

E. Msgr. Vojtassak and Jewish Property

The State prosecutor accused Msgr. Vojtassak of taking possession of Jewish property during the war. If that really happened, it would certainly be the first instance in Slovak history of the Church's seizing Jewish property. In reality this was all about something else. As long as the German Reich insisted on the Slovak Government's limiting or simply confiscating the property of the Jews, so long did it push the Secretariat of the German minority in Slovakia to buy up this Jewish property. Thus, for example, in the diocese of Spis, where a comparatively large number of Germans lived from the time of the Middle Ages, almost all Jewish properties were being consecutively transferred to German hands.

In order to avoid this occurring throughout the nation, certain Slovak circles organized for national action; in the organization the Bishop of Spis also participated. Thus Msgr. Vojtassak bought property from a certain Jew for the Spis diocese for which he paid the price demanded by law. This property was returned to the original owner in 1945, but it is not now known whether the original owner returned to the diocese of Spis the sum paid him in the former sale.

In considering the question of Jewish property, it is fitting to show the double standard of Communist justice. It is known that many Communists, during the regime of Msgr. Tiso, took over Jewish properties, (e.g. Commissioner Pull) under the racial laws which forbade anyone but "Arias" to hold property. This, however, did not interfere with their remaining in important political or official positions after 1945.

F. The Bishop's Relations With the Germans

The Slovak Bishops, from the very beginning of the Slovak State, took a definite stand against racism and the other erroneous doctrines of German National Socialism. For that reason they advised President Tiso to be cautious. They themselves made contact with the Germans only on exceptional occasions. Msgr. Buzalka confessed before the Court that during the time of the Slovak State he did make a courtesy call on Ludin, the German Minister to Bratislava. When Ludin, who had been converted in prison to Catholicism, was condemned to death in Bratislava by the "National Court," in 1947, he petitioned the State prosecutor to allow him to receive the auxiliary Bishop of Trnava. Msgr. Buzalka considered it un-Christian to refuse this final consolation to the former German diplomat, who was to be hanged, on December 9, 1947. No justice, except Communist, could see in such a visit any grave circumstance worthy of consideration.

As far as Msgr. Gojdic is concerned, it is probable that during the war he did send some Greek-Catholic priests from Slovakia into the Ukraine, and to get permission for their entrance into the Ukraine he had to arrange beforehand with the German officials, and the priests were dependent on German technical service. As for any other evidence of collaboration, it is sheer invention.

Outside of these incidents, contact of the Slovak Bishops with the Germans, if it existed at all, was limited. It is well known, for example, that at the revolt, in 1944, General Hoeffle, the Commander of the German Army in Slovakia, looked up Msgr. Charles Kmetko, the Archbishop of Nitra, to urge him to publish a pastoral letter against Bolshevism. And though it was not easy for him, nevertheless, this venerable Church dignitary had courage enough to refuse.

G. Justice in the Slovak State

Considering the fact that there was a war and that after Munich, Germany mastered all Central Europe, the

Slovak State remained comparatively free in its internal politics. The best evidence of this is the independence of the Slovak Judiciary. For the six years of existence of the Slovak State the Courts did not condemn anyone to death and did not execute anyone. Except for Siroky and Duris, now representing the Moscow and Prague authority over Slovakia, who were parachuted during the war into the country by the Russians and captured by the Slovak police, all Communists enjoyed complete freedom. If the number of those taken in by the police reached 3,000 persons, their average punishment did not come up to two months each. In order to evaluate justice in the Slovak State properly and under the conditions set up by the Communists in 1945, it must be stated that from 1945 to 1951, i.e. during the peace that the Communists so vociferously proclaimed, Communist justice in Slovakia condemned to death and executed 100 individuals, and sentenced tens of thousands to prison terms, the average of which exceeded more than one year.

H. Participation of Slovakia in "Hitler's War"

In his bill of indictment against the Slovak Bishops, the State prosecutor is not ashamed to hold them responsible for the sacrifices of human lives and economic losses suffered by Slovakia during "Hitler's war." It must be first declared that the Bishops were not a party to this war. As for the sufferings Slovakia underwent in the second World War, these were minor. Credit for this definitely should go to Msgr. Tiso. We can get a true picture of this fact only when we compare the Slovak "contribution" to the German war effort in the East with the Czech contribution. While the German debt to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, in 1945, reached the sum of about 9,270 million dollars (486,000 million Czech crowns), 11/ the German debt to Slovakia reached only 160 million dollars (8,000 million Slovak crowns).

11/ See: Kamil Krofta: Czechoslovak History, Prague 1946 p. 845.

While 600,000 Czech laborers worked for the German war machine directly in the Reich, and 2,000,000 in Bohemia and Moravia, 12/ there were but 100,000 Slovak laborers working in Germany. Without question, Slovakia, of all the States in Central Europe, contributed comparatively the least to the German war machine.

I. The "Slovak" Uprising

On August 29, 1944, Russian parachutists called on Slovakia to revolt. It was the partisan major of the Soviet Army, Velicka, who induced the Slovak soldiers in Turciansky Sv. Martin, on the morning of August 25, 1944, to shoot the German General Otto, together with 27 members of his party, on the grounds of the military barracks. The General was passing through Slovak territory in a German special train from Bucharest to Berlin.

This was a signal for Hitler to use armed intervention in Slovakia. The Bishops endeavored at this time to maintain a temperate stand towards both the Germans and the Russians. Only such behavior could assure Slovakia of a comparatively easy transition from one armed occupation to another. Therefore, in the declaration signed at a conference on August 27, 1944, in Banska Bystrica, the Bishops appealed to the populace to preserve peace and maintain order.

Nevertheless, about 30,000 persons, under the direction of the Communist and some Protestant personalities, joined in the revolt. And whereas 2,500 Slovak soldiers lost their lives on the Eastern front during three years of the war, in this mistaken uprising during three months 25,000 Slovaks lost their lives. Of this, however, the Communist Government says nothing. The "Slovak" revolt was a tragic national event. Its underlying purpose, which originated with the Commander of the Russian parachutists in Kiev, was to bring about armed German intervention in Slovakia, which would result in the liquid-

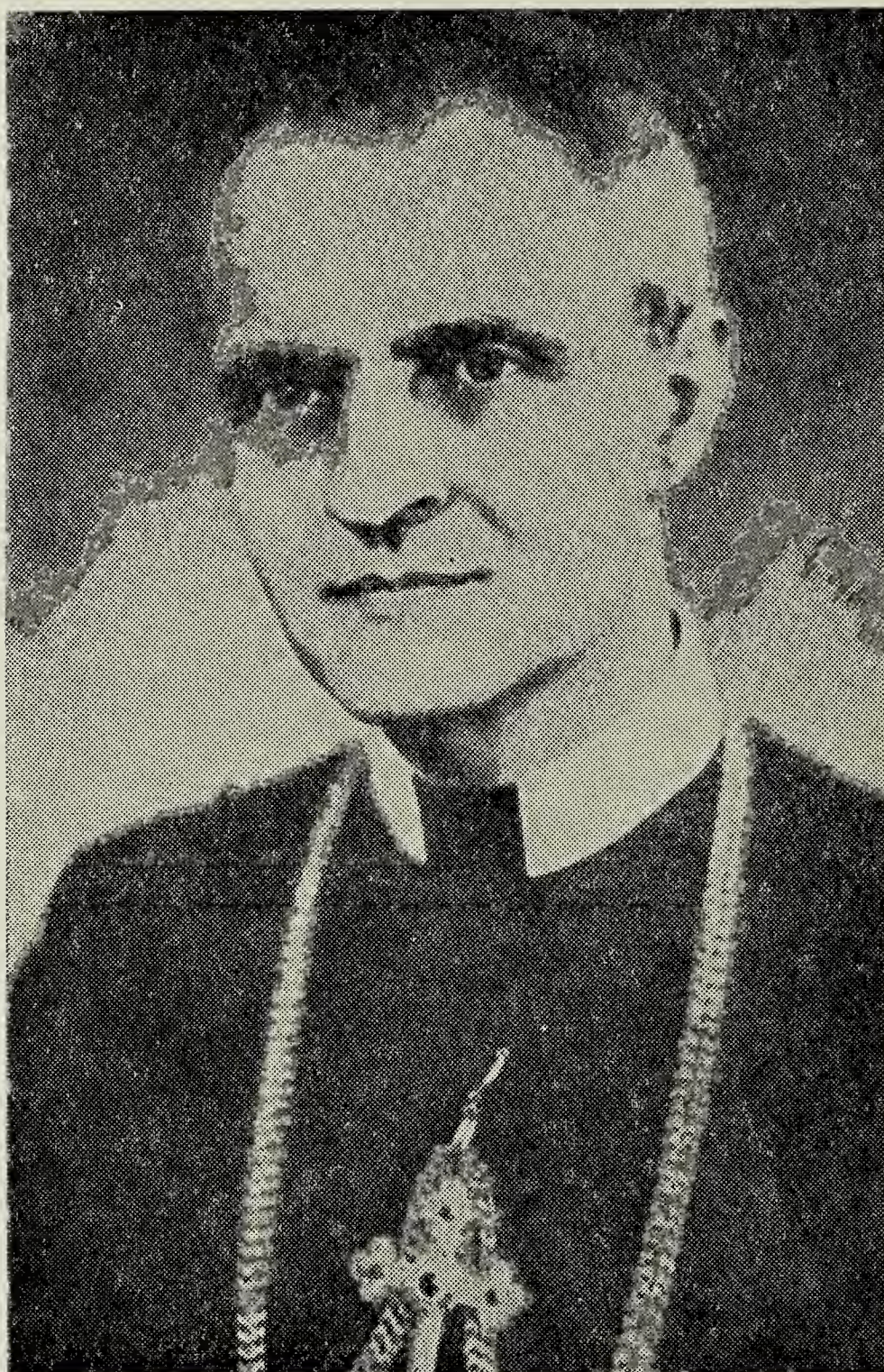
12/ Ibidem. p. 845.

ation of both the "democrats" and the "bourgeois Communists," forces with which the Russians did not wish to become involved. Hence the Red Army halted its advance at the Carpathian mountains and waited until the liquidation was complete. Then all that would be left for the Russians to do would be to liquidate the Slovak "Fascists." These calculations were really successful. The German reprisal was bloody. The mass graves found in many places are a witness to this. The entire responsibility for this tragedy falls up on the heads of those who provoked this intervention. It is evident that the Bishops, whose carefulness did not enter into the designs of Moscow, could not be held responsible for this national catastrophe.

J. The Arbitrary Nature of Communist Justice

To complete the analysis of the activities of the Slovak Bishops during the time of the Slovak State, and the better to emphasize the political nature of Communist justice, it is necessary to say something about the legal aspects of the Bishops' trial.

The Communist Judiciary does not subscribe to the old legal axiom: "There is no punishment, if there is no law." Furthermore, there is nothing to stop it from prosecuting "acts" which have occurred in the long forgotten past. What is more, Communist justice does not feel bound even by its own decisions. Msgr. Vojtassak and Msgr. Buzalka, in 1945, had already spent many months in jail under accusation of being collaborators. In the end they were released without trial because the State prosecutor could not then find adequate evidence to bring them before the Court. And although the activities of the "People's Courts", which were established in 1945 to punish collaborators, ended on December 31, 1947, the State Court in Bratislava, is not adverse three years later to overturn the laws, if in this way it can help the regime to realize its political designs.



MOST REV. PAVOL GOJDIČ
Bishop of Prešov

III. THE THIRD AND FOURTH CZECHO-SLOVAK REPUBLIC

(1945-1948-1950)

A. The Stand of the Slovak Bishops on the Revived Czecho-Slovakia

As far as the stand of the Slovak Bishops toward the third Czecho-Slovak Republic is concerned, it can be said that it was the same as that of the overwhelming majority of the Slovaks: in principle it was negative. Nor could it have been otherwise. The Red Army occupied Slovakia and forced upon it the Government of Dr. Benes, carrying out plans that had been determined beforehand in Moscow. Without any plebiscite whatsoever, Czechs annexed Slovakia, appealing to the consent of some Communist and Protestant personalities that had already in the so-called "Christmas Pact" in 1943 secretly agreed to conspire against the Slovak Republic. Furthermore, public opinion in Slovakia was strongly disturbed by the fact that assurances contained in the Atlantic Charter and in the Charter of United Nations warranting the right of self-determination to all peoples, small or great, should have remained without any application in relation to the Slovak nation one fourth of which is now living in free America. During the trial of Msgr. Tiso, it was only a strong support of public opinion in Slovakia that gave Msgr. Kmetko, Archbishop of Nitra, the courage to pronounce the following declaration, before the so-called National Court in Bratislava, on January 6, 1947:

"If Slovakia had the actual power to become free, all of us would be for independence." Prague was shocked! Benes saw that the most important authority of Catholic Slovakia did not consider Czecho-Slovakia as a permanent formation, but more as a lesser of two evils.

When the so-called "National Front of Slovaks and Czechs" in May, 1946, rejected the proposal of the Slovak

Catholics to form their own party, these had to decide between two parties: the Democratic, established by the Lutherans, and the Communist. In such a situation, the Bishops unanimously advised the voters to cast their votes for the candidates of the Democratic Party. And when, on May 26, 1946, the Democratic Party received 62% of all the votes in Slovakia, this was the result of the instructions of the Episcopal Synod.

Could it perhaps be true that some kind of bargain, as mentioned by the State prosecutor, had been made between the then Minister Pietor, a Lutheran, and Msgr. Gojdic, whereby the former obligated himself to donate an automobile for services rendered by the latter to the Democratic Party during the election in Eastern Slovakia? We must not forget that in the trial of Msgr. Mindszenty, Communist justice knew how to use forged documents against the accused. Therefore, any such statements as the above, which apparently had as their purpose the dishonoring of the Bishop, must be examined with greatest of care.

B. The Case of Msgr. Tiso

The Episcopal Synod did not in the least disguise its efforts to save the life of Msgr. Tiso at his trial in 1947. When Msgr. Kmetko was summoned to testify against the former President of the Slovak Republic, he immediately went over to the accused, as soon as he entered the hall of justice, took his hand and squeezed it as a token of brotherly love. When the Court, as was determined beforehand, pronounced the sentence of death, the Slovak Bishops as well as Msgr. Forni, Chargé d'Affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature in Prague, interceded with Dr. Benes to show mercy to Msgr. Tiso. How many German war criminals were set free (Dr. Schacht, Von Papen, General von Kesselring, etc.) and did not Msgr. Tiso deserve a mitigation of his sentence more readily than these? What in the eyes of the Holy See and the Episcopal Synod was but an expression of Christian duty, became to the Communist way of thinking "an approval of a crime."

C. The Bishops and the Slovak Emigrants

In the eyes of the Communist regime the Slovak Bishops gravely transgressed when, in 1947, they used a money order amounting to 10,000 dollars, which they had been offered as a gift from the Slovak Catholic Federation in America, for the needs of Slovak displaced persons instead of accepting it for the aims of the Church in Slovakia. Even though this money was used exclusively to relieve the misery of the thousands of Slovak displaced persons scattered throughout camps in Germany, Austria and Italy, yet, according to the State prosecutor the Bishops were undermining by this use the very foundations of the Republic. This is an instance of how a work of charity can become a crime in the eyes of the Communists.

D. "The Political Sabotage"

In 1946, some Slovak priests, with the permission of their Bishops, were elected as deputies to the central Parliament in Prague or as members of the Slovak National Council in Bratislava. Before the election which was to take place in May of 1948, however, the Episcopal Synod determined that in the coming period it would not allow any priest to become a political candidate. And three priests, Lukacovic, Horak and Doransky, who did not obey this decree, were suspended. The first two were also placed under excommunication. In this act of the Bishops the regime saw the Church rejecting it in every way. The fact that Msgr. Tiso was President of the Slovak State with the permission of the actual Church authority, only infuriated the Communists the more against the hierarchy of the Church. The Communists will never comprehend to what degree the position of Catholicism during the Slovak Republic differed from that created for it by Edward Benes and Klement Gottwald. Only by comparing the situation under the Slovak State with that under the Third Czecho-Slovak Republic can one understand why the Church did not act in the same manner during the two regimes.

E. "The Economic Sabotage"

The State prosecutor did not forget to accuse the Bishops of opposing the movement to organize the trade-unions, to industrialize Slovakia, and to establish collective farms. What is the truth in this matter?

The trade-unions, controlled in Czecho-Slovakia by the Communist Party, has been from 1945 the organization through whose help the Communists gradually set up dictatorship. Local Catholic circles and later on, and to a certain degree, the Democratic Party, attempted to go against this totalitarian tendency. Only in this way it is possible to grasp the meaning of the activity which the Rev. Galan began in 1944 among the workers in the textile mills in Rybarpole. This was but a limited form of Catholic Action such as the Church is carrying on so successfully and without opposition of governmental circles in France and elsewhere.

The Bishops would never have opposed the industrialization of Slovakia, if this really had as its purpose the raising of the standard of living of the population. In reality, however, the present feverish activity in the industrialization of Slovakia seeks to gain two important aims of Communist politics: the proletarianizing of the country, and the enlargement of the military potential of Russia and of the Soviet bloc.

From the election statistics of the individual provinces, it is evident that the Communist regime began to establish factories of every kind especially in counties where it was noted that in the past the majority of the voters were anti-Communistic, for example in Orava county. It depended, therefore, upon the help of the workers which the Communists recruited in all industrial centers, to break down the determined opposition to Communism in all the places where it was strong. The Communist Party went about this in such a way as to permeate entire provinces with "new soldiers" to Communism.

The matter of the collective farms is similar. If it were

simply a question of free association, one could expect definite progress and rationalization of work. However, in the Communist system the opposite is true, for by every means it schemes to tear the farmer away from his native soil and to change him into a seasonal worker of the State, who has lost his solid economic foundation and his consciousness of being an independent farmer, in a word, to make him just a number of the proletariat.

After all that has been done in Slovakia, the socialist agitation has not brought any improvement into the lives of the people. While Slovakia did not know any want or need any ration cards during the second World War, the present regime, after seven years of systematic "planning," had to introduce rationing of the fundamental foods: bread, milk, etc., to say nothing of shoes and clothes which, especially since 1945, are in very limited quantity. Why the existence of these provisions? Because the Slovak worker must labor in a much greater measure for the Russian war machine than is healthy for Slovak economy.

F. "The Military Treason" of Msgr. Gojdic

The most serious accusation made against Msgr. Gojdic is that after "the liberation" he organized in his diocese "a center for Ukrainian terrorists and other enemies of the Soviet Union"; that he helped Bandera 13/ and his Ukrainian followers in fighting Communism, and made it possible for them to pass through Slovak territory into Austria. The Banderians, persecuted by the Red Army, were Ukrainian patriots fighting Communism. As far as Msgr. Gojdic was concerned, as the Greek-Catholic Bishop, he could not refuse his help to his co-religionists from the other side of the Carpathians. These refugees from the "Soviet paradise" were for him simply Christians. He did not take into consideration the fact that the Soviet Union considers all refugees as traitors and crimi-

13/ The chief of the Ukrainian "White Partisans", in 1946 and 1947.

nals. In 1947, the Soviet Union, Czecho-Slovakia and Poland signed a police-army pact by which they bound themselves through mutual aid to liquidate the "Banderians" in their territory. The "Banderians" hunted in the Slovak hills by special units, were often forced into battle, and many members of the police units found their death on these expeditions. This act of Msgr. Gojdic of helping these Ukrainian fighters to the best of his ability, became in the eyes of the Communists, the complicity in their crimes. At the trial they showed him photographs of corpses, alleged sacrifices of the "Banderians". And even though the Bishop had no idea what corpses or whose corpses were in the photographs, he had to admit, to the great joy of the Court, that the photographs did portray killed or dead.

G. The Bishops and the State "Catholic Action"

June 10, 1949, the Government, depending on some so-called "patriotic" priests, started the dissident "Catholic Action," the members of which were soon after excommunicated by the Vatican. On July 1, 1949, the Holy See published the well-known decree according to which all Catholics joining the Communist Party of their own free will would be excommunicated. The Bishops, in ordering the clergy to read the decree in the churches, became "instigators against the socialist edification of the State." The Government then became fully determined to force Slovak Catholicism into dissension. It severed diplomatic relations with the Holy See, and interfered with the Slovak Bishops in the fulfillment of their spiritual duties. It organized a "State Office for Church Affairs," which, contrary to the prescriptions of Canon law, overruled the rights of the Bishops, began to name "diocesan administrators", "diocesan consultors" and "capitular vicars". Then it also took into its own hands the powers of these new Church dignitaries, i.e., to induct into office, as also to promote, change, recall and otherwise punish priests, in a word, to dispose of them as the State disposes of its other employees. By January, 1951, all

dioceses were under administration by the "capitular vicars" who had sworn an oath of fidelity to the Government. In place of the abolished episcopal seminaries, the State organized a dissident Theological Faculty in Bratislava.

The Bishops opposed this change by means of passive resistance and they saw with the greatest of pain a development which was to end in some kind of "National Catholicism," and later on to its subjection to the Orthodox Patriarch in Moscow. However, it was not enough for the State that it should wrest every power from the hands of the Bishops. It must humble them before the people, before the world. Here, at its best, was manifested the exclusiveness, intolerance and totalitarian make-up of Communism. To it any other spiritual stand is a crime!

H. "Betrayal" and "Espionage" of the Bishops

The accusation upon which the State prosecutor was determined to place the greatest reliance was that of espionage. What is the foundation for this accusation?

A direct consequence of the universality of the Church is that all ecclesiastical persons, as also all the faithful, are subject to the spiritual power of the Pope. This refers especially to the Bishops, who are, so to speak, representatives of the Vicar of Christ in the various parts of the earth, and for this reason are bound to keep in personal and written contact with the head of the Church (the "ad limina" visit to St. Peter). Certainly the purpose of these visits and of this written contact is to give the Holy See information about the religious life and ecclesiastical organization in a definite country, as also the circumstances which determine this life and this organization. Besides, the Holy See unceasingly sends the Bishops reports, by means of Nuncios, which are concerned with the over-all governing of the Church. This mutual contact belongs directly to the definition of the Catholic Church. Without it Catholicism would disintegrate in the many

local religious societies without any internal unity whatever, as exists in Protestantism.

To destroy the Church, Communism follows certain policies. The first is to separate the Bishops from the Pope. In order to give such a step a formal determined foundation, it proclaims that from its point of view the connection that exists between the Bishops and the Holy See is unlawful. This is the substance of "ecclesiastical espionage."

For proof of this it is sufficient to cite here the allegation made by Mr. Antonin Hobza, professor of International law and a former professor of Canon law at the University of Prague. He was called in April, 1950, as an expert to the trial which was held at that time in Prague against ten ecclesiastics. His statement ran something like this:

"Considering the fact that, according to an agreement with Italy from the year 1929, the Pope is a Sovereign of a State, i.e., of Vatican City, he is above all the spiritual head of all Catholics. In the Middle Ages the Pope, besides this, was also the monarchical ruler of all Catholics in the proper sense, and this on the basis of Canon law, which at that time was the real law, not only equal to secular law, but even superior to it. The papal legal Monarchy certainly belongs today irretrievably with the past.

"But because the Vatican is an important international factor, the various Governments maintain diplomatic relations with it through Nuncios and Internuncios. These have, according to generally acknowledged international practice, equal standing with the secular diplomatic representatives, and they have the same mission, i.e., to keep in contact with the Pope and follow on all sides the development of life in the State which accepts them. Besides, they take upon themselves, just as do all other diplomats, the obligation of not interfering with the internal affairs of the State. The relation of the Nuncios and the Internuncios with the Pope is not, however, governed by International law, but by Canon law, which in the eyes of the modern State has not the character of the law at all.

"The regimes of the people's-democratic and socialist States

reject conclusively and in principle the idea that any foreign official could in any State or territory enforce a law which does not originate in the will of the people, i.e., in the will of the sovereign nation. While at one time the State and the Catholic Church pursued the same ends, while, that is, there was a political union between Church and State in principle, and while Canon law was equal to State law, it is understandable that the Nuncios and the Internuncios were able, in the name of the Pope, to control the Bishops and the rest of the clergy, not only in the spiritual field, but also in the civil-political. The Vatican operates under such an assumption even today, for it is still guided by Canon law, which, as was mentioned before, the modern State does not acknowledge. Legality in the modern State does not divide itself any more into civil and canonical, but is singularly and exclusively civil.

“The views of the Church,” continues Mr. Hobza, “as formulated in the ‘Codex Juris Canonici,’ had been reproduced and more fully explained by J. Pasquazi, professor at the ‘Pontificium Intitutum Utriusque Juris’ in Rome. According to him the representatives of the Holy See fulfill a twofold mission, diplomatic and religious. In performing the second mission they can, according to Pasquazi, deal directly with the Bishops and the faithful; they can, for example, give them direct counsels, instructions or laws in the name of the Roman Pontiff. From this it follows that if the civil authorities give out a law or decree opposed to the rights of the Church, the Holy See can not only intervene through its representative in the civil government to repeal the law or decree, but can directly appeal to the faithful to act, under the circumstances, in a certain definite way against the law or decree.

“In contradistinction to this it must be stated: All questions which touch upon civil law, are internal questions of the State, and according to International law, no diplomatic representative has the right to interfere with them. This also applies to the civil laws which regulate the questions of ecclesiastical life within the State. The spiritual bond between the faithful of Czecho-Slovakia and the Pope is by the Czecho-Slovak legislation neither permitted nor forbidden, but neither the Bishops nor the faithful from Czecho-Slovakia are subject to the jurisdiction of the Pope, but only to the jurisdiction of the public authorities and Courts. Already the

Austrian law, in the year 1874, concerning external matters of the Catholic Church, defined this religious organization in the sense of law as a community totalizing the number of Catholics living on State territory, And by Czecho-Slovak laws the divided jurisdiction between the State and the Papal Curia was never introduced nor acknowledged. The Catholic Church is not organized according to International law, and therefore, neither the relation between the Pope and the Internuncios, as also between the Pope and the Bishops is of an international character, but has a character genuinely ecclesiastical and canonical.

“As one of the most significant and important factors in world politics, the Pope could have diplomatic representation in a State where there are no Catholics, and where, therefore, the ‘Canonical rights’ of the Nuncios and the Internuncios toward a certain section of the citizens would not exist. From what has been said it follows that direct contact of the Internuncio with the Bishops of Czecho-Slovakia has not and cannot have an official character either in the sense of Czecho-Slovak law or in the sense of International law. The Internuncio in Czecho-Slovakia is only an ordinary political representative, who is allowed officially to deal with the Government and through the channel of the Government. In the Czecho-Slovak Republic the Internuncio for that reason has no right to bring to the Bishops papal decrees which are in conflict with the law, and has no right to counsel the faithful to act in this or that way toward a law or decree of the civil authority. And if he acts otherwise, he is breaking International law, because he is intervening in the internal affairs of the State, and, at the same time, he is committing, according to Czecho-Slovak laws, a crime, for which, it is true, he cannot, because of extraterritoriality, be brought before a Czecho-Slovak Court. A crime is also committed by a Czecho-Slovak ecclesiastical functionary who, at the suggestion of the Papal representative, counsels his subjects to act against the law.

“As to the specific situation described by the bill of indictment against the ten ecclesiastical functionaries, I formulate my statement thus: the bill of indictment classifies the offenses which have been committed by these functionaries into two categories: 1) the delicts falling within the definition of the crime of high

treason; 2) the delicts falling within the definition of espionage—both within the meaning of the laws of Czecho-Slovakia. If the Court acknowledges that by judicial proceedings the committing of these crimes was proven, we have to do with criminals even guilty from the point of view of International law.

“It is well known that the enemies of the Czecho-Slovak Republic are endeavoring to upset it, that they are inciting and supporting the actions of traitors to the country and organizing espionage. And the Vatican is working with them for the same purpose. In comparison with other States, the Vatican, in matter of espionage, has a great advantage in the institution of canonical obedience of the ecclesiastical subordinates. Vatican espionage, by its efficiency, probably ranks first among all the espionage systems of the world. State that does not acknowledge Canon Law, does not, as a consequence, acknowledge canonical obedience. Therefore, there is not, and there cannot be any canonical subordination or obedience of the Czecho-Slovak Bishops and the other Czecho-Slovak ecclesiastical functionaries to a foreign power, as is the Vatican. There remains only the genuinely spiritual connection, i.e., the religious, in the highest sense of term.

“The existence of religious Orders,” Mr. Hobza said in closing his report, “stipulating a complete and strictest obedience is in open conflict with the established law of the Czecho-Slovak Republic. As to the question of mutual relationship between the higher and lower ecclesiastical functionaries within the State territory of Czecho-Slovakia, there is a similar relationship as one of subordination among public officials. The ecclesiastical Czecho-Slovak functionary who gives preference to canonical obedience to any foreign power whatsoever, lives in conflict with the State laws and thus becomes a traitor. It is evident from the trial proceedings, that when the diplomatic representative of the Vatican intervened in whatever manner in the internal affairs of the Czecho-Slovak State, he broke this important International law and the laws of the Czecho-Slovak Republic and abused his position as a diplomatic representative.” 14/

So much for Professor Hobza!

14/ “Svobodne Slovo” (Free Word), Prague, April 4th, 1950.

If we did not know in detail to what extent the Soviet Union meddles in the internal affairs of the Czecho-Slovak Republic and of the other satellites, it would seem to us that the learned deductions of Professor Hobza would be considered as the proper subject of an academic debate on the relations of Church and State. Today, however, when Russia has installed the Soviet Marshall Rokosowsky in Poland, when in Slovakia the Slovak communists: Clementis, Husak, Novomesky, etc., who were sent to Prague Parliament by the Slovak voters, have been liquidated; when Russia took over completely the agricultural riches of the States it mastered, then the conclusions of Professor Hobza can really have for their purpose only the support of Communist politics, a new form of attack against the Church.

According to Hobza's statement, whatever contact is established as a result of canonical obedience of the Bishops to the Pope or of missionaries in distant lands to their superiors, it is an act of espionage. The reports which the Slovak Bishops sent to the Vatican during the period of the Slovak Republic as also during the third and fourth Czecho-Slovak Republics, were, according to the view of the Communist regime, criminal just as were the reports of Msgr. Buzalka, the military Vicar General of the Slovak Army in the Ukraine. The nature of the contents of the reports means nothing to the Communists. The fact that these ecclesiastical dignitaries were in contact with their superiors is sufficient evidence for them to be accused of the crime of treason.

To the democratic world, however, it is clear that the Government of Czecho-Slovakia, when it forbade the reading of the pastoral letters in the churches, and when it expelled the diplomatic representative of the Holy See from Prague, violated the constitutional freedoms guaranteed to its citizens. It can be asked, whether in States where true religious freedom reigns, the Bishops do use special couriers to keep in contact with the Apostolic Nuncio and with their clergy? In such States, do the

Bishops have to send their reports to the Holy See through foreign consulates? It is generally known that even those democratic States that have no diplomatic relations with the Holy See allow the Apostolic Delegate to live in their territory, and that he is entitled to establish contact with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, it is done, for instance, in the United States of America. If the articles of the Communist Constitution of Czecho-Slovakia in 1948, which deal with the freedom of religion, were not a dead letter, Msgr. Buzalka would never have been forced to turn secretly to the Austrian consul in Bratislava in order to get his report delivered to Rome.

The case of the missionary, John Kellner, is basically the same. He at one time studied at the Roman seminary, the "Russicum." That is the only seminary existing in free Europe for the education of missionaries of the Greek-Catholic Church since the first World War. During the second World War, while the Germans occupied the Ukraine, this young priest went to that country as a missionary. Could he be called an espionage agent for that? Nothing the Communists do should surprise us, since in occupied China, and, in the present war in Korea, where they have imprisoned many missionaries for no other reason than that they were "the fifth column of the Vatican." Because the Catholic Church is today the greatest spiritual force determinedly opposed to Communist totalitarianism, it has become necessary for the Communists to strike down without mercy its brave representatives.

I. The Secret Faculties

Before the arrival of the Red Army in Slovakia, the Bishops did not know how the Russians would act toward the Church or toward the ecclesiastical hierarchy. They had to prepare themselves for every eventuality. Therefore, at the Episcopal conference on August 27, 1944, in Banska Bystrica, they issued a confidential instruction which was to insure the operation of the Church, even if she were to become a sacrifice to persecution. The Bishops

declared in this document that they had a right to transfer their functions to other worthy priests and to organize a "Church of the Catacombs" such as existed during the persecutions of the first Christians. According to the prosecutor it was Father Kolakovic, "the Vatican spy", who was the author of this instruction.

This same question of transfer of Episcopal authority came up in 1950, when the life of the Church again became very difficult. Hence, almost all the Bishops in Slovakia, on the basis of the authority and permission of the Vatican, made provision for the assured continuation of the ecclesiastical administration of the dioceses in the event that the Bishops should be imprisoned. From the standpoint of the hierarchy this provision was entirely reasonable. Because the State did not allow the Church to manifest itself in the open, she prepared herself for the life of concealment. Communism can never comprehend that the hidden life can have for its purpose the care of the spiritual needs of the faithful and the performance of the Sacraments. Because Communism is involved in innumerable crimes, it has a tendency to see evil in anything anyone else does.

J. The Bishops Against "Pax Russica"

Can the State prosecutor be believed when he accuses the Bishops of working for a "Pax Americana" to reign over the entire world, that they play the game of the Western "instigators of war"? It can truthfully be said that the Bishops as the spiritual leaders of a nation always conscious of its Christian heritage, had many reasons for fighting according to their own strength against the moral and physical servitude in which the present-day Slovakia had fallen. But if one day war broke out between the Soviet Union and the Western world, the responsibility of the defenseless Slovak Bishops for it would be infinitely less than the responsibility of those leaders and statesmen of the Soviet Union, who have already been working for a decade to get the people into a universal concentration camp.

CONCLUSION

This account has been concerned with the activities of the Slovak Bishops only in general. We can take it for granted, however, that this commentary expresses the true substance of the "transgressions" committed by the Slovak Bishops, just as it expresses the true meaning of the term "criminals" as applied to the Church dignitaries of other nations when these—God forbid—once get into the power of the Communists. Therefore, all the other accusations which this analysis does not take up, even if acknowledged through a so-called "spontaneous confession" of the Bishops, are but propaganda and invention.

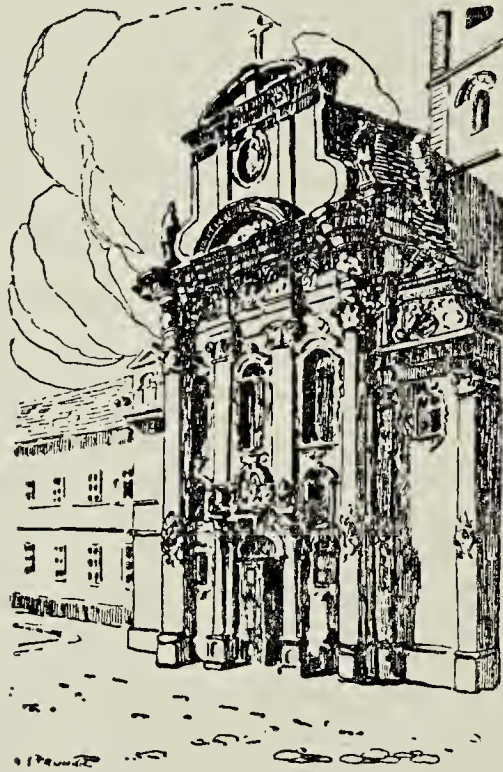
The hearings of the accused during the trial, as can be read in the official publication of the Czecho-Slovak Ministry of Justice in Prague, 15/ is terrible evidence of the psychological pressure which the accused had to undergo.

Even Msgr. Vojtassak, a personality known to all for his moral strength and national consciousness, is but a part in a play of crooked "justice." Msgr. Vojtassak, standing in the light of blinding reflectors, literally hounded with questions of which the last one is more intolerable than is any other, having no strength or time to formulate answers, awakens in us infinite sympathy and pain. It must have been a terrible experience for Msgr. Vojtassak, who, sitting "in the shadow of death," had to take such treatment from the governmental officials, and listen to the derisive testimony of unworthy so called "patriotic" priests. The defense lawyers, even with the best intentions, cannot, since they are appointed by the Government, defend the innocents, and if they timidly dared to introduce some mitigating circumstances, it would be of no effect.

15/ Ministry of Justice: The trial of the traitorous Bishops: Vojtassak, Buzalka and Gojdic. Bratislava, February 1951.

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Under such circumstances these honorable old men have no other choice left but to accept the hard lot of religious and national martyrdom. And the down-trodden Slovakia in despairing defenselessness can but cry over the gradual death of the imprisoned shepherds and hope for the day of liberation.





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